Grand Central Post Office Annex
Southwest corner 45th Street and
Lexington Avenue
New York City
New York

HABS No. NY-6302

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NY,
31-NEW YO,
169-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GRAND CENTRAL POST OFFICE ANNEX HABS No. NY-6302

Location: The block bounded by 45th Street, Lexington Avenue, Depew Place, and the Graybar Building (the southwest corner of 45th Street and Lexington Avenue), New York City, New York.

USGS Central Park Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18 .586450 .441166

Present Owner: United States Government

Present Occupant: United States Post Office

Significance

The Grand Central Post Office Annex was envisioned as a key element of the Grand Central Station complex, one of the most important examples of monumental urban planning in the United States. Designed by the nationally significant architectural firm of Warren and Wetmore, in collaboration with the firm of Reed and Stem, the complex was built between 1903 and 1914 for a railroad cartel headed by the mighty New York Central Railroad. It included the massive Terminal itself, surrounded by raised traffic viaduct, the Post Office Annex, railroad offices on 45th Street, and a vast underground network of tracks and platforms. The breadth of the project and the richness of its execution documents not only the tremendous wealth of the railroads during the period, but also their influence in shaping the image of American cities. The Annex was constructed as part of the complex to provide railroad-related office space on the upper floors while the lower stories were leased as a postal facility. The struoture as built was only part of a much larger planned complex, although the intended extension to the south was never realized. In 1932, the federal government purchased the edifice from the New York Central. In 1937/1938 the building underwent a major interior alteration under the direction of the United States Postal Service. Nonetheless, the classical granite and limestone building has maintained its prominence and civic oharacter with the Lexington Avenue landscape.

PART ONE: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

1. Dates: Planning 1903-1906; oonstruction 1906-1909.

2. Architect: Reed and Stem; Warren and Wetmore.
William J. Wilgus, engineer.

3. Owners: New York Central Railroad (Leased to United States Post Office); purchased by the Post Office in 1932.

Deeded December 28, 1932, New York Central Railroad to United States of America. County of New York, (No. 466; Register's No. 4G 257); copy of deed in Washington National Record Center, Suitland, Maryland; Record Group 121, Box 658, folder one.

Supplemental Deed July 23, 1936, New York Central Railroad to United States of America. County of New York, July 23, 1936 (Lib. 3932, p. 131); copy of deed in Washington National Record Center, Suitland, Maryland; Record Group 121, Box 658, folder one.

4. Builders, Contractors and Suppliers

John Pierce Company, Builders. Plaster work done by Davis Brown. Doors and trim provided by Dahlstrom Metallic Door Co. Electrical contractor, J. Livingston Co. Painting, Charles Grimmer and Son.

5. Original Plans and Construction

The original plans for the Grand Central Terminal, prepared by Reed & Stem in 1903, were completely revised by Warren & Wetmore between 1904 and 1906. Fairly complete architectural drawings for the original building survive in the office of the building superintendent (see Bibliography). Construction of the Post Office Annex began in 1906, the building opening on February 6, 1909, although the construction of the Terminal continued until 1913. The entire cost of the project, including the Terminal and Annex, as well as the cost of the land, was approximately $80 million.

6. Alterations and Additions

Extensive alterations were undertaken in 1937/1938, under the auspices of the Superintending Architect of the Treasury, Louis Simon; Carroll Pratt was the consulting architect. All of the four lower stories were completely demolished on the interior, and entirely rebuilt for the Post Office, leaving none of the original partitions and interiors. The upper stories were remodelled into government offices. At the same time there were minor changes to the exterior: some new windows were installed, some openings were partially infilled, and several utilitarian structures were added to the roof. The contractor for these changes was the Milliment

Construction Company. The principal suppliers included the S. H. Pomeroy Company, New York, which provided the bollow metal windows; the A. Le Poidevin Company, New York, which supplied the granite; and the General Bronze Corporation, which manufactured the decorative metal work.

Since 1938 there have been ongoing minor changes in the building, chiefly in the upper stories where office partitions have been altered and drop ceilings inserted. Little change has occurred to the exterior or in the public spaces, although modern aluminum doors were added in the 1960s. Some substantial changes have been made to the mechanical systems, chiefly in order to accommodate modern air-conditioning systems. This has resulted in the addition of intake air louvers on the facade, particularly on the south and west elevations. On the south, a corrugated metal chute has been inserted for conveying mail between levels; this chute runs diagonally in two flights, its upper flight terminating at each end in a corrugated metal shed. In addition, a metal fire escape has been inserted on the western elevation above the loading bays. These later changes are recorded in architectural drawings kept in the office of the building superintendent.

7. History and Significance

The Grand Central Post Office Annex traces its origin to the mid-nineteenth century with the ascendance of the great railroad conglomerates. During the course of the Civil War, Cornelius Vanderbilt had gained a controlling interest in three railroads, the New York Central, the New York and Harlem, and the Hudson River, establishing a virtual New York rail monopoly. As soon as the war ended he set about establishing a joint passenger depot. Vanderbilt (1794-1877) was a former steamboat entrepreneur and an intrepid capitalist. He understood that a depot to the north of the densely built-up city would spur New York's growth and increase the value of real estate in the area. At his behest, the site on 42nd Street was acquired for the new depot; this building, built in 1871 by New York architect John Snook, was tbe forerunner of the present terminal. Major rebuildings and enlargements occurred in 1884, 1897 and again in 1899. The union station was enlarged repeatedly: in 1884, in 1897 and again 1899. By 1903 it was apparent that a new station was needed and that the pressure of real estate development in Manhattan required the lowering of the tracks below grade. Toward that end, the New York State Legislature authorized the construction of a new building and a change in grade (Chapter 425; Laws of 1903).

A closed competition was held for the new station, limited to two national firms (McKim, Mead & White, and Burnham & Root) and to two relatively unknown firms: Samuel Huckel from Philadelpbia and Reed & Stem from St. Paul. These smaller firms were recommended by the chief engineer of tbe station, Wilfred Wilgus (1865-1949), who had been promoting the idea of submerging the tracks of the railroad below ground and who was the driving force behind the new building. He recommended Huckel who had done the 1899 remodelling of Snook's depot, and presumably he invited Cbarles Reed's firm on the basis of family connections (Reed was his brother-in-law). Reed & Stem was then a little-known architectural firm in St. Paul, Minne-

sota. Charles A. Reed (1857-1911) studied at MIT and his partner, Allen H. Stem (1856-1931), graduated from the Indianapolis Art School. Their scheme, likely worked out with Wilgus's advice, called for a vast monumental court stretching to the north of the terminal building, and flanked hy office buildings. Wilgus, who helped to pioneer the shift from steam to electric railways and who was sensitive to the urban consequences of such a shift, should be regarded as having had an influence on the architecture of the terminal and the vast complex around it. Not surprisingly, Reed & Stem's design was chosen. The resulting scheme called for a vast urban complex, comprising not only rail facilities, but also creating an above-ground planned ensemble of office buildings, carefully related to one another and linked by an above-the-street automobile viaduct. As projected by the winning architects, Reed and Stem, there was to he an ensemhle of buildings, consisting of the terminal itself, facing 42nd Street and capped by a skyscraper tower, and two extended wings of office buildings to the north. The design was envisioned not only as a transportation facility hut as a civic monument; it called for a symbolic court of honor to the north, a full Beaux-Arts scheme integrating buildings, parks and public sculpture.

In early 1904, Reed & Stem were forced to share the commission with the firm of Warren & Wetmore, whose interests were represented hy Warren's cousin, William Vanderhilt, chairman of the New York Central. Whitney Warren (1864-1943) originally studied architecture and engineering at the School of Mines at Columhia College, hut then spent several years studying at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris where he worked in the atelier of several prominent French architects. His partner, Charles D. Wetmore (1867-1941), was a graduate of Harvard Law School who later turned to architecture.

Reed died in 1911 and afterwards Warren and Wetmore were ahle to have themselves appointed the sole architects for the Grand Central complex, without previously oonsulting Stem. Stem sued for his lost fees, although he was not ahle to collect until 1920 when he was awarded $500,000. Warren's unethical conduct appears to have tarnished his reputation and he was expelled from the American Institute of Architects.

Ethics aside, Warren and Wetmore were a more estahlished architectural firm and had more extensive experience with the erection of large civic huildings. Under their auspices construction hegan, according to the revised design, in 1906. The Post Office Annex--an office building whose first three floors were leased by the Post Office--was the first building to he hegun and completed, opening on Fehruary 6, 1909. Originally designated as Suhstation H and later as the Grand Central Post Office Annex, this station has heen in continuous operation on the site. Although leased hy the Post Office, the New York Central continued to hold title to the huilding. They used the upper stories for their offices and for office rental, and maintained track facilities under the huilding. In fact, as the first unit of the depot to be built, the Annex also served as the station until the opening of the main station several years later.

Built according to Warren and Wetmore's modified design, the Post Office Annex was only part of a much larger projected design. The building, forming only half of the intended office block, was to have been extended to the south by an identical wing; furthermore, smaller matching buildings were to have flanked the office block to the north and south. None of these were built. Nor was the projected 12-story addition that was to cap the original structure. Despite these reduotions in scale, the Annex remained an integral part of the Grand Central Complex.

On July 12, 1932, Congress authorized the expenditure of up to $14,500,000 for the purchase or construction of a post office. On December 28, 1932, the site and the Annex were bought from the New York Central for $9,000,000, the amount to be paid by June 30, 1937. Because the tracks of the railroad still ran under the building, the terms of the deed were very restrictive, limiting the air rights for further construction and requiring the government to maintain the huilding for the railroad company, to grant them access, and allow them perpetual sub-surface rights. A puhlic controversy erupted, which held that there were so many covenants and easements on the property that the government did not have a clear title. As a result of negotiations, the deed was modified in 1936, removing some of the restrictions. Since then the property has remained the possession of the United States, and the tracks of the Grand Central Station are still maintained in use under the Annex.

Having decided to alter the existing building, rather than construct a new Post Office, the Postal Service undertook a major program of remodelling in 1937/1938. The interior was almost entirely demolished and rebuilt as an enlarged and modernized post office on the lower stories, with the upper stories rehabilitated as government offices. The Annex has remained in operation, with few changes to the structure, since then. In recent years the property around the Terminal has seen much real estate activity and new construction. Although the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood has changed, the Annex by virtue of its monumental composition, rich materials and bold massing continues to assert the monumental civic character of the original Grand Central plan, even in the transformed environment of modern New York construction.

PART TWO: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Introduction

The Grand Central Post Offioe Annex, was built in 1906-1909 as part of one of America's largest railroad station complexes. Its architectural importance lies in its integration into a large Beaux-Arts urhan composition, within which it is important in its own right as a sophisticated classical building of limestone and granite with a rich ornamentation including some remarkahle sculptural carving.

The Post Office was part of the original Grand Central Complex scheme as designed by the St. Paul, Minnesota firm of Reed & Stem, who won the commission in a dramatic, nationally important competition in 1903. Reed and Stem's ambitious design was substantially reduced by 1906, and when construction hegan, the original architects were working in conjunction with another firm that had more experience in erecting building complexes on such a vast scale: the firm of Warren and Wetmore. Even with the reduction in scope, the Post Office Annex was a large and critical element in the composition. As it stands, the present huilding is all that was built of a much larger projected structure that was to extend to the south as far as 43rd Street.

The building is in a good state of repair. The exterior is well-preserved and has retained much of its original early twentieth century character. The interior, however, although in generally good condition, is in large part the result of alterations undertaken in 1938 and in suhsequent years. While the upper office stories were preserved, the post office lohhies and the lower stories were completely rehuilt; in those areas none of the 1906-1909 interior survives.

EXTERIOR

The building is an eight story hlock, of rectangular form, measuring 220'9" on Lexington Avenue hy 275' on 45th Street. Its composition is tripartite, oonsisting of a prominent Stoney Creek granite base which is capped by a rising limestone shaft of four stories and finally crowned with a classical cornice and an attio story, also of limestone. The facade is organized into vertical bays which reflect the interior steel frame, the Lexington Avenue facade consisting of 10 bays and that on 45th Street of 12 hays. The eastern facade, on Lexington Avenue, is treated as a monumental pavilion to the north, embracing the final three hays; this contains muoh richer sculpture including carved heraldic shields that enframe the pavilion at attic story height. Although this pavilion is currently an asymmetrical feature, the original 1906 design called for it to he halanced with a projected extension to the south, thus completing the symmetry.

1. Foundations

The foundations posed a particular problem because of the building's location ahove the tracks of the New York Central Railroad. On the east portion of tbe site is a storage yard comprising 12 tracks while to the west are two levels of train platforms. The upper of these was originally planned for express trains while the lower was for suburban trains, running nortb-south under the building. The location of these platforms determined the locations of the steel and ooncrete foundation piers. These piers are spaced on a grid of 20'9" on center the north-south axis, running parallel with the trains, and roughly 44' on center on the east-west axis perpendicular to them. The footings on which the piers rest are of concrete and are located from about 35' helow street level along Lexington Avenue to a maximum depth of ahout 60' at the northwest corner of the huilding.

2. Walls

The exterior walls are of brick over a steel frame; on the surface they are faced with machine-tooled ashlar masonry, with Stoney Creek granite for the ground story and limestone for the upper stories. Ornament and sculpture is concentrated on a few key features, in keeping with the austere classicism of the design; decoratively embellished areas include the window surrounds and trim (see Openings, below). A classical modillion oornice caps the huilding. The facade of the original building remains largely intact although in the course of the 1938 remodelling some of the ground story doors were converted into windows, and vice versa. In these cases, the soffit and jamb details and the stone work were made to match tbe original materials and detailing. The granite bases of tbe infilled doors were supplied in 1938 hy A. le Poidevin, New York City.

Tbe interior ligbt court is treated more simply and is constructed of buff-colored brick in common bond over the steel frame. Like the main elevations, tbe walls of tbe light court are composed as a series of multi-story piers carrying an entablature, above which there is an attic story, a crowning cornice and a parapet. The ornament and detailing is correspondingly more austere: brick soldier courses enframe the spandrels between the windows and at the upper story level tbe piers are enlivened by a brick zigzag pattern. The cornice is a simple classical entablature, composition, witb terra cotta modillions and fascia. Interlocking terra cotta tiles are used for the ooping course ahove the parapet wall.

Tbe southern elevation is treated similarly to the light court, since its recessed central section was intended to serve as an identioal ligbt oourt when tbe huilding was extended to the south. Therefore the projecting arms to either side of the court, serving as temporary walls, are completely unarticulated, and relieved only by the pattern of window openings. By the time of the 1937/1938 alterations, when it was already clear tbat the building would not be extended to the soutb, these projecting wings were refaced.

3. Framing

Behind the load-bearing masonry walls, the structural system consists of a grid of steel beams encased in concrete, reflected in the bay division of the exterior, with 11 rows of beams running north-south (spaced at 20'9" generally) and 13 rows running east-west (spaced at 22' generally). These columns continue through to tbe sixth story, except where the central light court and the light court to the south intervene.

4. Openings

The elevations of the Annex are composed according to a formal hierarchy, and the arrangement and treatment of openings vary correspondingly. Most important are the east and north elevations on Lexington and 45tb Streets, respectively. The west elevation on narrow Depew Place is less prominent. Finally, the south elevation and the light court are not treated as part of the public character of the building, and have tbe most utilitarian fenestration.

The fenestration follows tbe organization of the elevations into vertical bays, which in turn reflects the building's internal structural system of piers. Simple pilasters mark the bay divisions along the length of the facade, except for the end pavilion at the northeast corner of the building, where a colossal order of columns separates the bays. Between these masonry pilasters are set vertical registers of metal-framed window openings. In general there is a trio of openings per bay on every story of the east, west and north elevations.

The rear elevations and tbose of the light court are treated more simply. The west elevation on Depew Place repeats the materials, composition, and ten-bay articulation of the east elevation, although it lacks the end pavilion. The ground story consists of a loading bay, recessed into the volume of tbe building. The light court is also composed according to a simpler and more utilitarian scheme, and consists of virtually unarticulated wall surfaces of light tan brick, laid in common bond. The south elevation, extending to the property line, was originally constructed as a provisional wall, prior to the completion of a planned soutbern wing to match the first building. It consists of an unrelieved wall of buff colored brick into which its openings are set without elaborate surrounds. Its middle six bays are set back to tbe depth of one bay, forming a secondary light court that was to have been completely enclosed witb the completion of the building. At present the southern elevation is obscured by a large enclosed conveyer, encased in corrugated metal, that runs diagonally across the building from the fifth to the third story. The lowest two levels form a party wall witb the adjoining Graybar Building.

The door openings on the ground story, part of the original 1906-1909 building, are riohly molded and ornamented; of particular note is the carving around the entrances, whicb consists of rich garlands of oak leaves and aoorns. Such intricate carving in granite is rare, because of

the hardness of the material, and indicates the importance attached to the building by the railroad. During the 1938 alterations, some of the door openings were reduced in size to form windows, while some windows were likewise enlarged into doors in the course of the remodelling (see Walls, above). These changes are readily apparent although they closely match the materials and details of the original design. The doors are set beneath transoms screened by bronze grilles, dating from the 1938 alterations. These grilles were supplied by the General Bronze Corporation, Long Island, in 1938 and installed by the Millimet Construction Company. Some of the ground story openings have been further altered in recent years and the main post office doors, of glass and aluminum, date from the 1960s.

All door and window openings are flat-headed, and capped by steel lintels concealed behind stone jack-arches. Except for changes in trim and hardware, their original 1906-1909 form was retained. In contrast with the ground story, the soffits and reveals of the upper story windows are plain and unarticulated. Likewise, only those on the first story are screened by bronze grilles. Like those screening the doors, these were manufactured by the General Bronze Corporation, Long Island, in 1938 and installed by the Millimet Construction Company.

The window frames, transoms, and the spandrels between the stories are of cast iron while the sash and stops are bronze. Most frames and sash above the ground story level generally date from 1906-1909, although they were reglazed in the course of the 1937/1938 remodeling. Some replacement of the original windows, however, did occur and new steel windows were installed in the new penthouse and elevator tower erected in 1938; these new units were provided by the S. H. Pomeroy Company, (Hollow Metal Fire Retardant Windows), New York City.

The windows of the light court are bronze and are grouped in triplets, divided by metal mullions; they are capped with steel lintels and have plain unmolded jambs and soffits. The windows of the south elevation, meant to form another light court when the building was extended, are similarly simple. In the recessed center section, they match the windows of the light court. But the two flanking wings projecting to the south, whose end walls were viewed as temporary, were originally only a thin brick shell with paired windows. In the course of the 1937/1938 remodelling they were removed and new brick walls were installed to match the elevation of the recessed light court, including the arrangement of triplets of windows. These windows have steel sash, unlike the bronze sash throughout the rest of the building.

5. Roof

The roof is composed of two sections: there is a mansard-like roof, just barely visible from the street level below, that is sheathed with copper. Behind this and concealed by it, is a flat, built-up composition roof. The roof owes its somewhat irregular form to the original unfinished scheme for the building, which called for it to be extended to the south with a matching wing. Therefore the northeastern corner of the roof,

where the 45th Street wing meets that on Lexington Avenue, forms a prominent hipped intersection that was intended to mark one of the oorners of a much larger building; the same is true of the northwest corner. On the other hand, in the southeastern and southwestern corners the roof simply terminates in a gable where it was to abut the extension of the building to the south.

Resting on the built-up roof to the rear and not visible from the street are several ducts, louvered ventilators and a variety of utilitarian structures of simple industrial character. These include a metal water tower on the southern flank and a fan house inserted into the southwest corner of the light court. These date from the 1937/1938 remodelling of the Annex, and are of hrick in common bond with flat brick arches and hollow steel sash windows. The only one of these roof structures of monumental character, and the only one visible from the street, is the 1938 penthouse on the northern flank that heads the elevator shafts rising from the main lobby. This penthouse is constructed of brick, although its limestone revetment and its classical cornice matches the character of the building that it caps.

INTERIOR

1. The Plan

The Post Office Annex includes a ground story containing the postal service areas, two stories of mail-sorting facilities, and four stories of office space. The building's plan varies according to these different functions. The ground story comprises the public lobbies, the postal service windows, the postal work areas hehind them. The principal space of interest is the postal lobhy of J-shaped form, running the length of the eastern elevation with a lengthy jog along the northern elevation and a shorter one across the southern flank. This lobby consists of one open hall, designed to provide maximum access to the range of post office service windows; it terminates in the stair and elevator lobby in the middle of the northern flank. As the cardinal public space of the building, the postal lohhy is given a monumental treatment and is highly finished, richly ornamented with decorative terrazzo floors, banded with bronze strips, the marble wall panelling, marble work tables and hronze trim.

The first and second stories form the mail-sorting facility. These are large and virtually unpartitioned work spaces, divided only by the regularly spaced piers of the building's structural system. Of special note is the second story which has twice the height of the other stories, the additional height heing taken up by a mezzanine level along the exterior perimeter. Above the work spaces are the concealed galleries where the postal inspectors can watch the mail handlers unseen, a standard element of post office design.

The upper stories of the Annex are arranged according to a square-shaped utilitarian plan, which consists of a double-loaded corridor arranged around a central light court. On each story the main corridor is flanked hy office rooms on either side, lighted either from the exterior or the light court. This light court commences only above the third level (second floor).

One plan feature was governed hy the position of the building, suspended ahove the tracks of the New York Central Railroad. Since no basement could be built beneath the huilding, it was necessary to house the mechanical and plumbing facilities in an upper story. This story, the so-called pipe gallery, forms the fifth level of the huilding and is unfenestrated except on the southern elevation facing the Graybar huilding and in the light court. The pipe gallery is expressed on the exterior by the broad entahlature and cornice crowning the building. This solution, which reconciled a serious constraint through an ingenious arrangement of plan and elevation, is an unusual feature of what is otherwise a oonventional utilitarian office building design.

2. Stairs and Elevators

The building's armature of stairs and elevators is the result of the 1938 remodelling when the elevator shafts and marble-veneered stairways of the original 1906 building were removed. Typically, the stairhalls are finished with plaster walls and ceiling and with tile waitscotting on the lower levels. The stairs, dating from 1838, have metal risers and strings, have concrete slah landings, and are equipped with wooden rails, metal tuhe newels and metal balusters; the floors are of grano, a synthetio flooring material that was used in the 1930s.

The principal stair in the current building is located near the middle of the northern facade, directly behind the seventh and eighth bays from the left; alongside the stairwell rise the principal elevator shafts of the building. This stair ascends in two flights per story to the top of the building. A reflection of the twin functions of the building--serving both as a post office and as a government office building--is that there are two separate lobhies on each floor, each one serviced by its own set of elevators, for the use of the public and for postal workers.

There are several subsidiary stairs; these are essentially fire stairs, with only utilitarian finishes and without a formal lobby on the ground story. One is in the southeast corner of the building and another is set into the northwest corner of the central light court. The latter of these is connected to an elevator tower whioh was inserted into the corner of the light oourt in 1939, and contains two freight cars serving the Post Office mail handling areas on the lower five levels. In addition, there are some internal stairs and ladders that serve the ohservation level above the main mail-sorting space on the second floor.

3. Finishes

The finishes vary according to the function and location of the spaces in the building. There are three distinct types of spaces within the building; these comprise the public lobby and postal service area on the ground story; the mail-handling rooms on the second and third stories; and the office space on the upper stories.

The most elaborately finished space in the building is the postal lobby on the ground story, with its generous use of marble, terrazzo and bronze. This entire space dates from the 1937/38 remodelling; none of the original building's finish survives here. The floors are of colored terrazzo, made from Tennessee and Colorado marble, and arranged in decorative geometric patterns of stripes and lozenges, set within marble borders. The walls are panelled with marble arranged in a muted decorative scheme consisting of Tennessee marble and Coral Rose marble with Baker Cedar marble comprising the baseboards and borders. The borders between the individual stone panels are highlighted by thin marble strips. The coved cornices and the ceilings above them are plaster; while there was originally a decorative painting program of stencilled ornamental patterns along the edges of the ceiling, this has been obscured by later repaintings. Interior doors and the postal sales windows are bronze; bronze is also used for the public tables in the lobby, which have marble tops. Except for some repainting, most of the surfaces and most trim in the lobby is intact and in good condition.

The work rooms of the first through third stories are typically treated in a more utilitarian, frankly industrial style. The floors are either concrete or wood strip, or both in those areas where mail handling equipment rests on individual areas of wood flooring. Walls are plaster, as are the furred out ceilings. Because of the heavy use in these work areas, the walls are extensively wainscoted to roughly 6'4" with large blocks of industrial salt-glazed tile, as was common in contemporary post offices. As on the ground story, these finishes are entirely the product of the 1937/1938 alterations, and none of the original finishes survive.

The bathroomsare durably built, consisting of terrazzo floors, marble wainscotting, and plaster walls and ceilings.

The upper story finishes are more elaborate than those of the post office work areas in the lower stories; in the corridors, the wainscotting is of marble, arranged in a colored pattern, above which the walls are plaster. The baseboards are either marble or metal; oorridor floors are typically terrazzo. These generally date from the original construction although some sections were reinstalled or rebuilt in the course of the 1937/1938 alterations to match the 1906-1907 finishes. The offices on the fourth and fifth stories typically have linoleum floors, plaster walls and plaster ceilings.

4. Hardware

The drawings for the original 1906/1907 building indicate a rich errey of bronze fixtures, perticularly in the public vestibules, lobby and stair hall in the ground story. All of this was removed in the course of the later remodelling. The herdware and trim that survives reflects the expensive meterials and austere version of classicism common to government buildings and post offices of the 1930s. Among these features are the marble-topped work tables and some Art Deco-inspired trim, including the marble clock faces. Of interest is the window hardware, most of which survives intact from the original 1906/1907 building phase. This trim is of bronze, including the stops; the windows are counterweighted, and the concealed weights hung on metal chains.

MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT

1. Heating

The original 1906-1909 building was heated with a perimeter steam heating system, with radiators regularly spaced along the exterior walls. The heating plant wes located at Pipe Gallery Level. During the 1937-1938 renovations, this system was refurbished but left intact. In the 1970s the steam-heating plant was modified end a centralized, forced hot air system was installed, although in some areas the steam radiators were maintained.

2. Lighting

Most of the building, including the corridors, upper-level offices, and the postal work areas, is now lighted with florescent lights, apparently installed during the 1950s. Some of the original metal and gless electric light fixtures appear to have survived, including those in the main postal lobby.

3. Plumbing

The plumbing system in the building essentially reflects that built in the original 1906-1909 construction phase. In the course of the 1937/38 remodelling there was an expansion of the plumbing capacity in response to the greater demand, as the building was now densely used by continuous shifts of postal employees; thus the Annex has large toilet facilities on each floor although the shower fecilities that were present before 1937 were removed in the course of that remodelling. At the same time the water tower was added to the roof.

The principal feature of interest in the plumbing system was dictated by the presence of railroed tracks beneath the building. Without a basement to house the building's mechanical and plumbing systems, they were grouped on the fifth level of the building, between the third and fourth stories, designeted es the "Pipe Gallery."

4. Special Features

There is a variety of specialized post office machinery on the first and second stories above ground level; these include original 1938 machinery as well as more recent equipment, and comprise mail-sorting devices, spiral chutes between the stories, scales, and stamping machines. Another feature of note consists of the curved metal railings that screen radiators and water fountains, protecting them from the passing carts.

One notable feature no longer appears to survive: the post office's system for sending mail through pneumatic tubes to other post offices in the city. Established as a private system just before the turn of the century, by 1938 the federal government was operating the network. According to oral tradition among post office employees, the tube-loading machinery was removed when system was discontinued, apparently during the 1950s or 1960s. Perhaps portions of it survive intact underground.

5. Furniture and Furnishings

None of the 1906-1909 interior furnishings or furniture appear to have survived; very likely they were lost when the railroad vacated its offices in the upper story during the 1930s, and tenants lost their leases. Furthermore, none of the original 1906-1909 mail-handling equipment appears to have survived.

SITE

The Grand Central Post Office Annex, at the southwest corner of 45th and Lexington, takes its place on a corner site within the New York City street grid. Covering 1.4 acres, the Annex remains visually connected to the Grand Central station by the raised automobile viaduct that extends around the station and that passes behind the Post Office annex on its western elevation.

Part of a planned development of the Grand Central Terminal, the scale and character of the Post Office Annex were determined by its relationship to the Terminal and its tracks. Long before the Post Office was built, the tracks of the New York Central Railroad, which extended northwards from the Terminal site since the mid-nineteenth century, had played a significant role in the urban development of upper New York. When the new Terminal and associated buildings were designed in 1903, it was clear that the basic spatial organization of the original depot would be maintained, consisting of the tracks leading to the north, terminating in the depot to the south, leaving the flanking blocks to the east available for development as office and commercial space. At the core of this development was to be a seven story block of railroad offices, rental offices and postal facilities, extending from 43rd to 45th Street on Lexington Avenue.

The full scheme developed for the complex between 1903 and 1906 called for the site to be treated as a virtually self-sufficient Terminal City. But this plan, reflecting America's growing interest in comprehensive and

ambitious urban planning during the early twentieth century, was never realized as other commercial developments soon hemmed in the site. First, the Annex was not built to its anticipated length on Lexington Avenue Street; only the northern section was built. Any plans to extend extend the Annex to the south were permanently abandoned in 1925 when the New York Central Railroad sold the site to the south to the firm of Todd, Robertson and Todd. These prominent New York City developers promptly erected the Graybar Building, a thirty story tower. Also unrealized was the original 1906 plan to add an additional twelve stories to the Annex. Because of these changes to the surrounding properties, and because of demolition of other buildings, the apparent scale and integrity of the Grand Central complex was dramatically changed. In particular, the formal relationship of the Annex to the Terminal is no longer as obvious as it once was. The Annex now sets in a dense patch of high rise development. Its principal relationships to other elements in the neighborhood, besides its connections to its neighboring buildings, consist of its relationship to the automobile viaduct around the Terminal, its location above the tracks, and above all, its shared history with the planning and development of Grand Central Terminal.

PART THREE: BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Architectural Drawings

A fairly complete set of architectural drawings survives in the office of the building superintendent for the Post Office Annex. These include the original 1906/1907 Warren & Wetmore/Reed & Stem drawings as well as a set of drawings related to the major 1937/1938 course of alterations. There are also drawings of later alterations, primarily to the mechanical systems, from the 1950s and 1960s. Almost all of these are blue-prints rather than the original linen drawings, which apparently no longer exist; in many cases they are poorly preserved. Further materials, chiefly consisting of site plans, are in the National Archives Annex at Pickett Street, Alexandria, Virginia.

2. Photographs

The principal collection of photographs pertaining to the Post Office Annex and to the Terminal is that in the New York Public Library, Local History Collection. These photographs record the construction of the buildings, and include valuable views of the surrounding neighborhood. The most detailed early photographs of the buildings of the Terminal site are in the collection of the Avery Library, Columbia University. Finally, the Museum of the City of New York has photographs of the 1871 terminal and also a series of photographs depicting the construction of the present building between 1906 and 1914.

3. Archival Collections and Other Sources

There are a number of materials pertaining to the history of the Grand Central Annex in United States archives. The site history--in particular, the legal battle surrounding the acquisition of the Annex in 1932 from the New York Central Railroad--is covered in a collection of materials at the Washington National Record Center, Suitland Maryland (see Record Group 121; Box 658; folders one through three). Particularly important is the 308-page legal brief filed by Attorney Louis Broido challenging the legality of the sale: see the brief, filed July 19, 1935, in folder two.

A further group of related materials is found under Record Group 121, Box 5941; General Correspondence 1910-1939 (and 1934-1945). These materials appear to be all that remains of a larger collection that once included considerable correspondence concerning the alterations to the Post Office in 1937 and 1938. This large collection was apparently destroyed during the course of archival reorganization which retained preserved materials dealing with new federal construction but removed those pertaining to remodelings or alterations.

Tbere are several sets of materials in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. See in particular tbe Records of the Public Building Service, Item no. 92; Inspection File of Construction and Inspeotion Engineers.

The Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York, New York has some of Reed & Stem/Warren & Wetmore's original materials relating to the design of the building, including early studies of tbe elevations and a scale model. Other architectural drawings, including presentation perspectives from the 1903 oompetition, as well as photographs of these drawings from contemporary magazines and newspapers, survive in the colleotions of the New York Historical Society, and the New York Public Library, Local History Collection. The Public Library also has a comprehensive collection of New York City atlases, showing the site of the future Post Office Annex at regular intervals in 1868.

4. Published Sources

In addition to the published sources listed below, there is a mass of unsorted articles scattered in New York City newspapers, tracing the ongoing construction of the Grand Central complex between 1905 and 1912. This material justifies further study. Among other articles, the evolving designs for the Grand Central Station complex were reproduced in a series of articles in the New York Times. See August 16, 1908 (part 5; page 4); Sept. 12, 1909 (part 5; page 9).

Eberlein, Harold D., "Recent Railway Stations in American Cities," Architectural Record, Vol. 36 (1916), p. 98-121.

Fitch, James Marston and Diana S. Waite, Grand Central Terminal and Rockefeller Center: A Historic-critical Estimate of their Significance (Albany: New York State Parks and Recreation, 1974).

King's View of New York (New York, 1907), p. 62; (1908/1909), p. 69; (1915), pp. 56-57.

MacMillan Enclyclopedia of Architects, 4 vols., (New York: Macmillan, 1982). Contains biographies for the principal architects and referenoes for further literature.

Meeks, Carroll L. V., The Railroad Station: An Architectural History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956).

Nevins, Dehorah., ed., Grand Central Terminal: City within tbe City (New York: Municipal Art Society of New York, 1982).

"New Grand Central Terminal," Architects' and Builders' Magazine XII, 1910/1911, pp. 45-51. Contains plans and drawings.

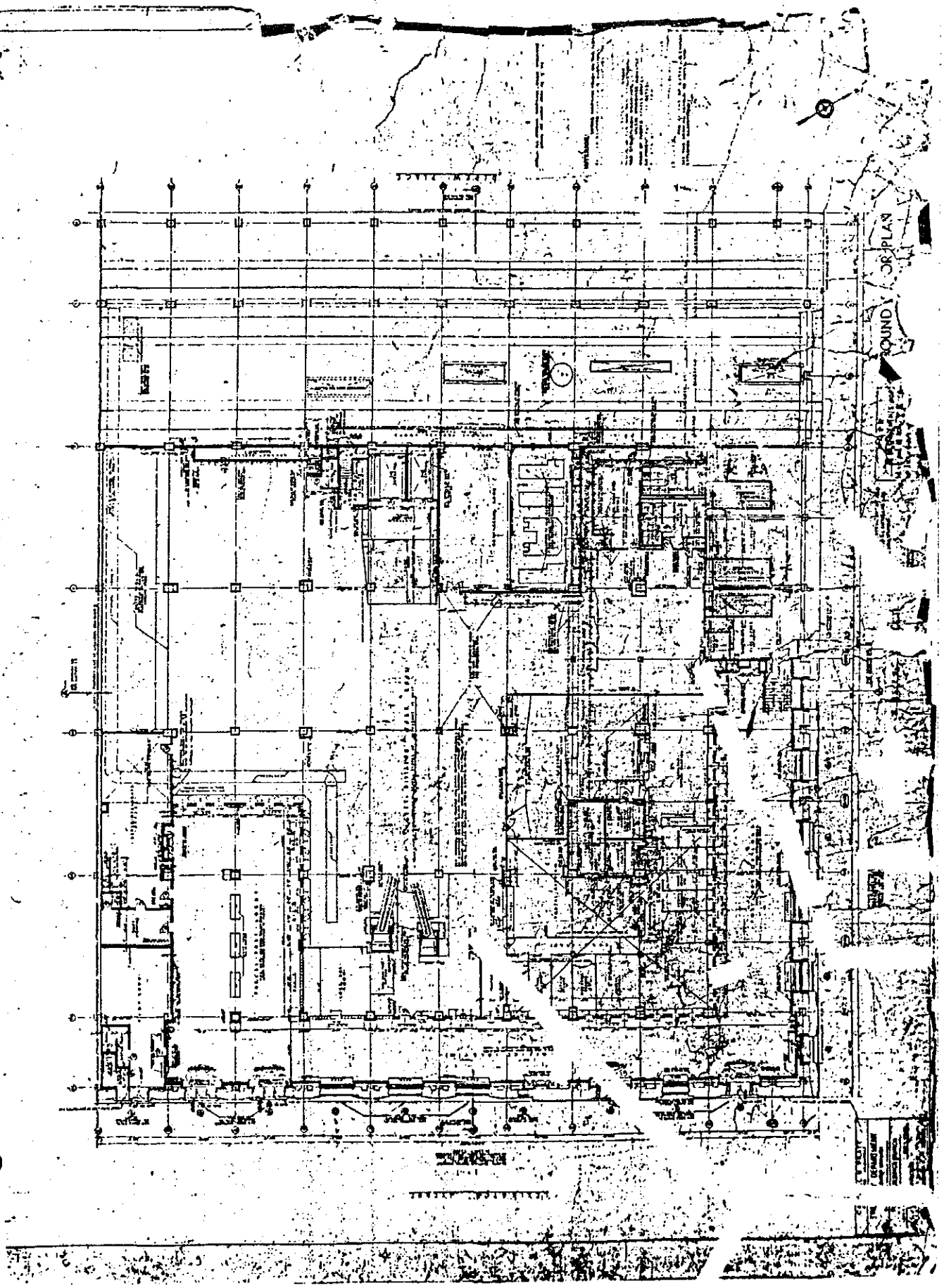
New York Times, February 6, 1909 (page 1, col. 5); notice of the opening of the new Post Office.

"Post-office and General Office Building for the New York Central Railroad," American Architect and Building News, Vol 90, (November 24, 1906), No. 1613, p. 169. Contains plans and elevations, and also shows the intended enlargement of the building.

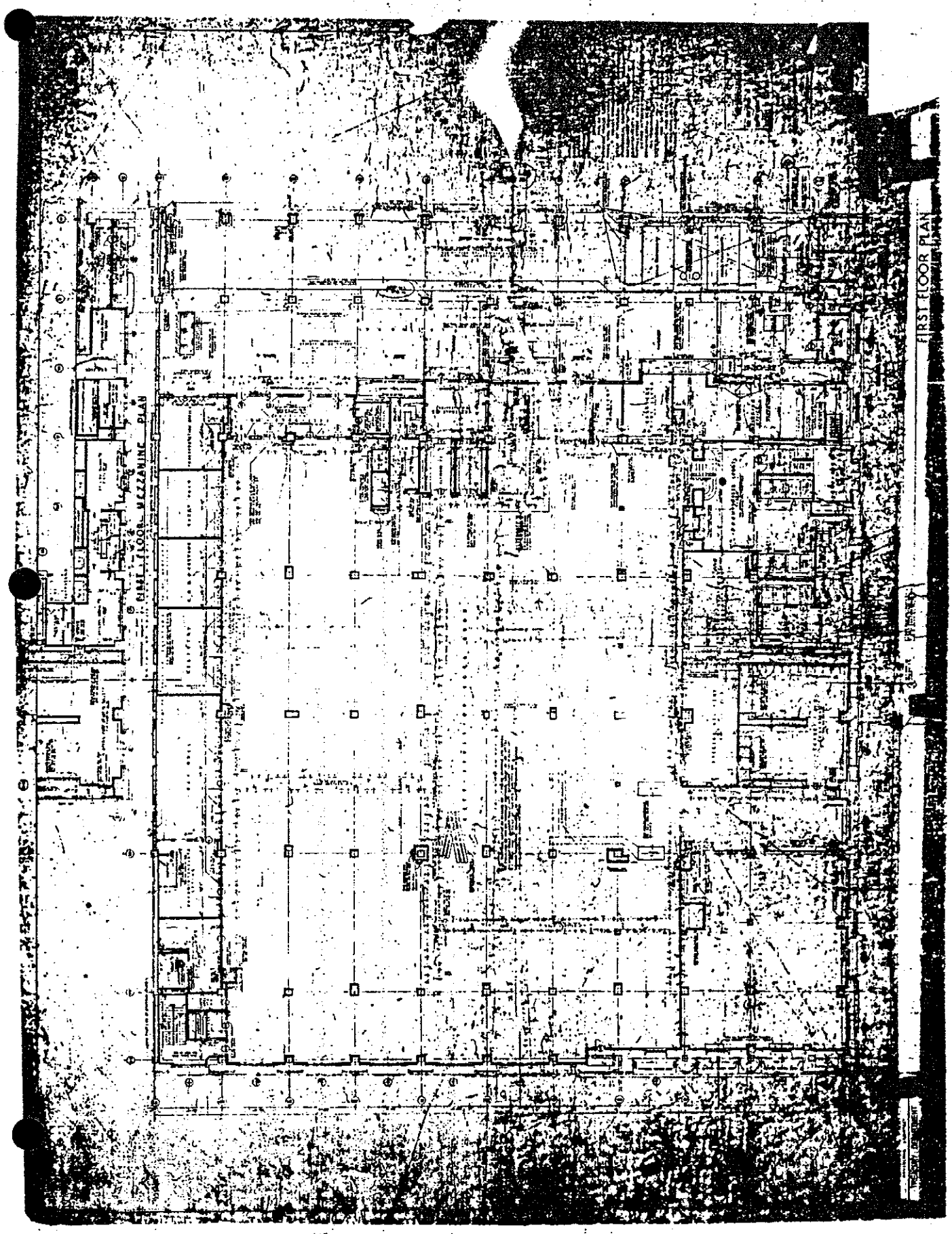
Scientific American CVII (December 7, 1912), No. 23. A special issue, devoted to Grand Central Terminal and its related buildings.

PART FOUR: PROJECT INFORMATION

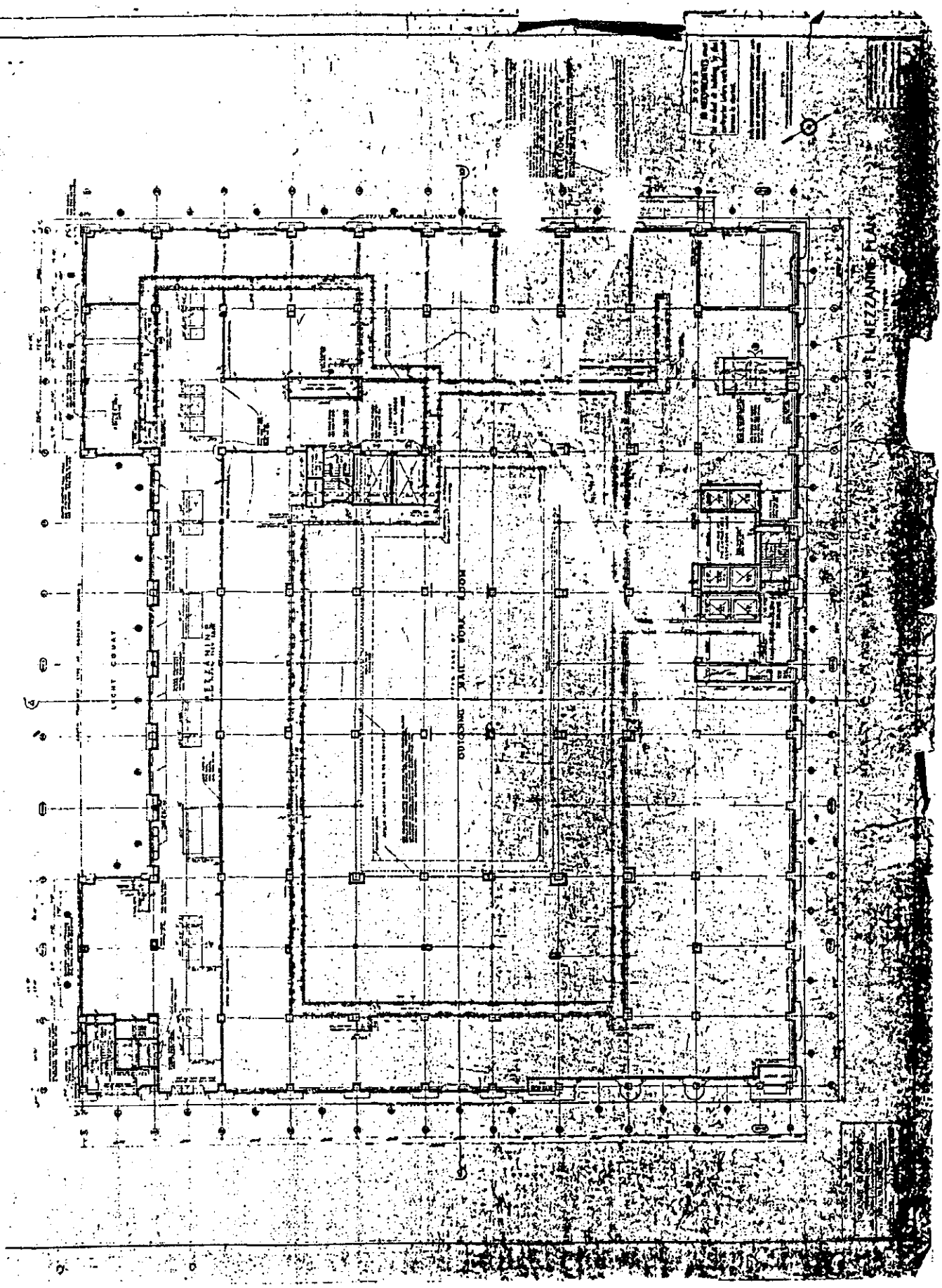
This project was sponsored by the 450 Lexington Venture in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the New York State Office for Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort prior to the renovation of the Grand Central Terminal Annex. The report was prepared by Clio Group, Inc., consultants to the architectural firm of Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum. It was researched and written by Michael J. Lewis, under the direction of Carl Doebley, President, Clio Group, Inc. Additional research and materials testing were undertaken by Susan Glassman. Photographs were taken by Graydon Wood in November 1988.



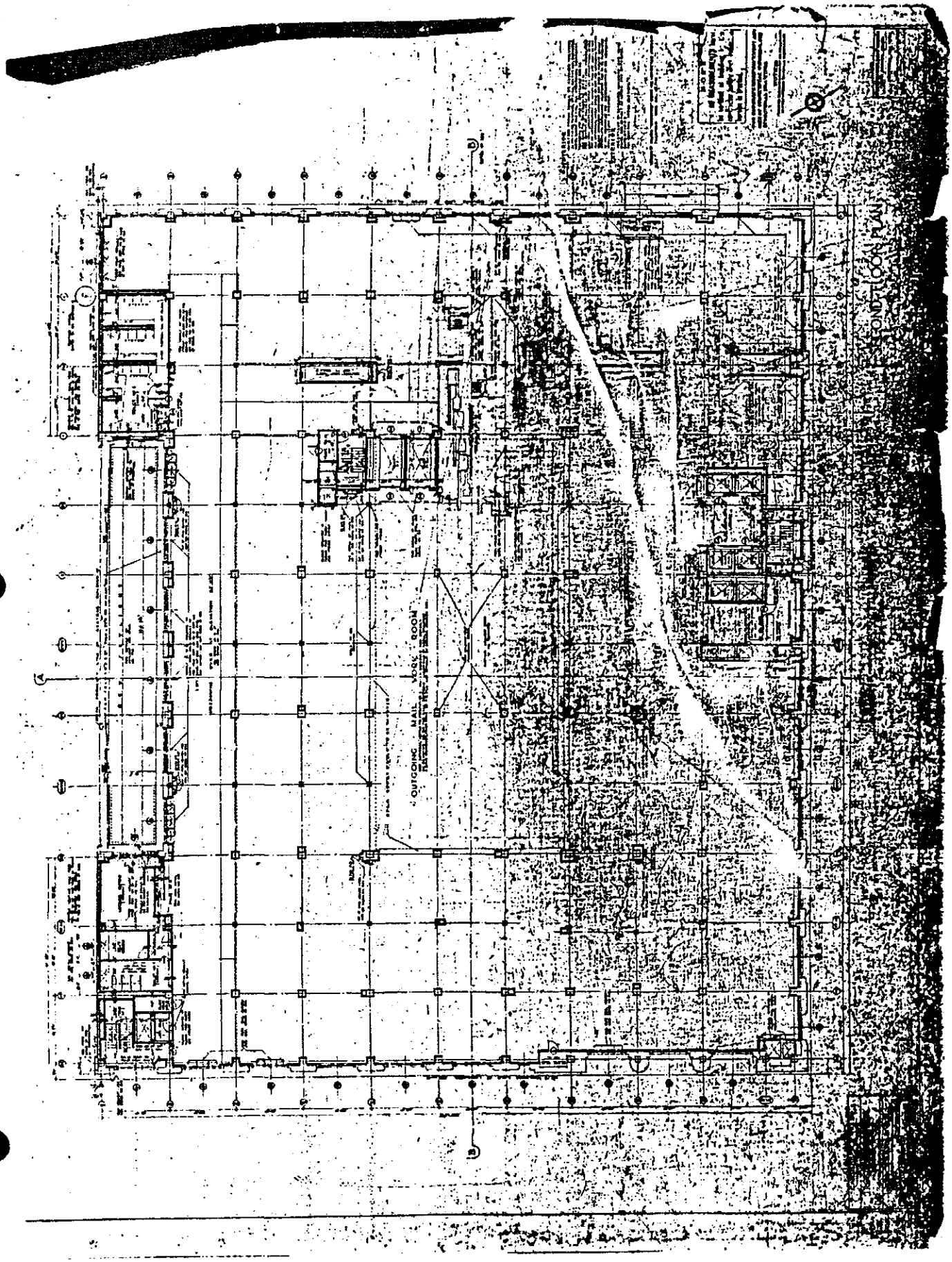
Ground Floor Plan



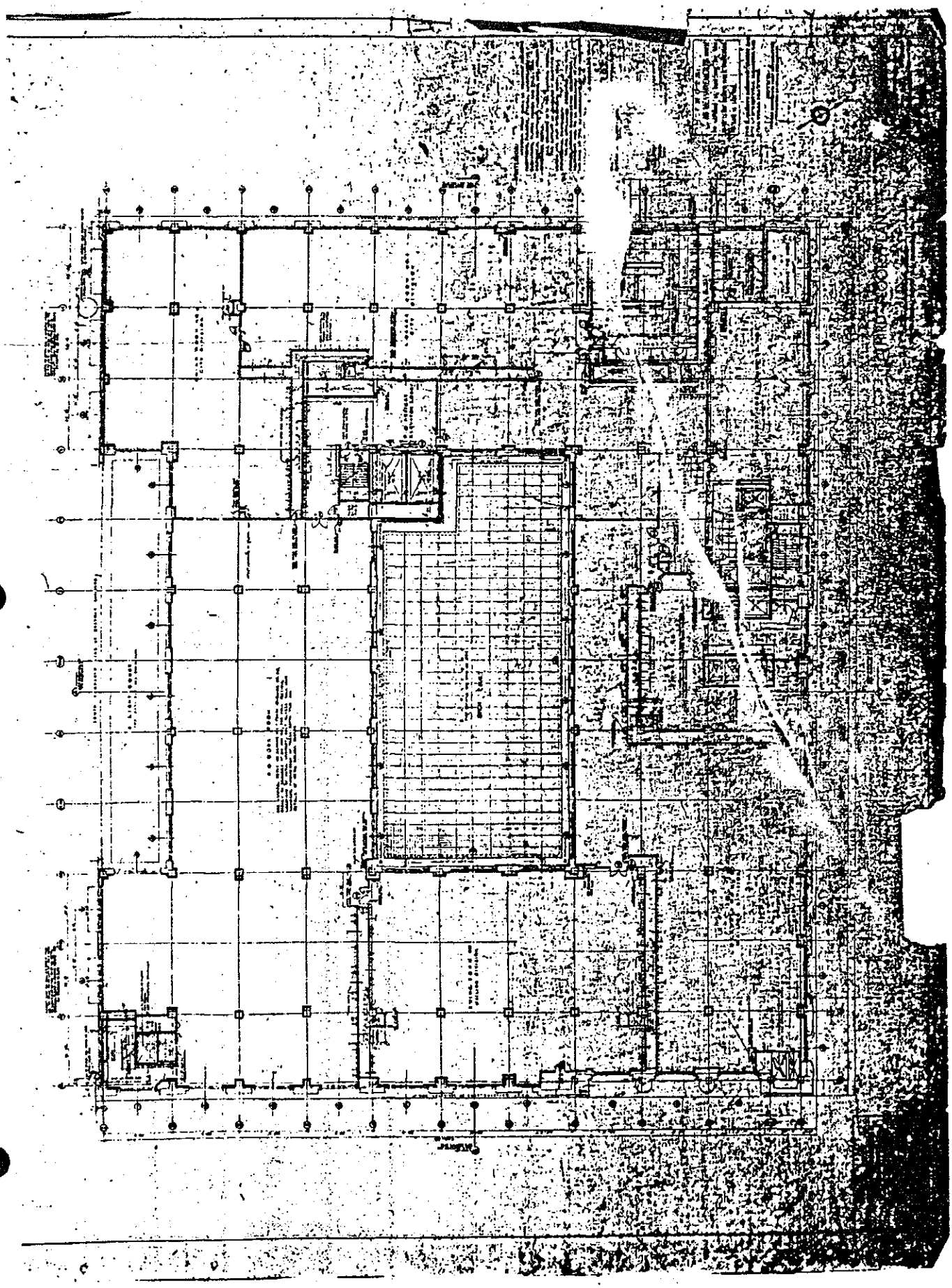
First Floor Plan



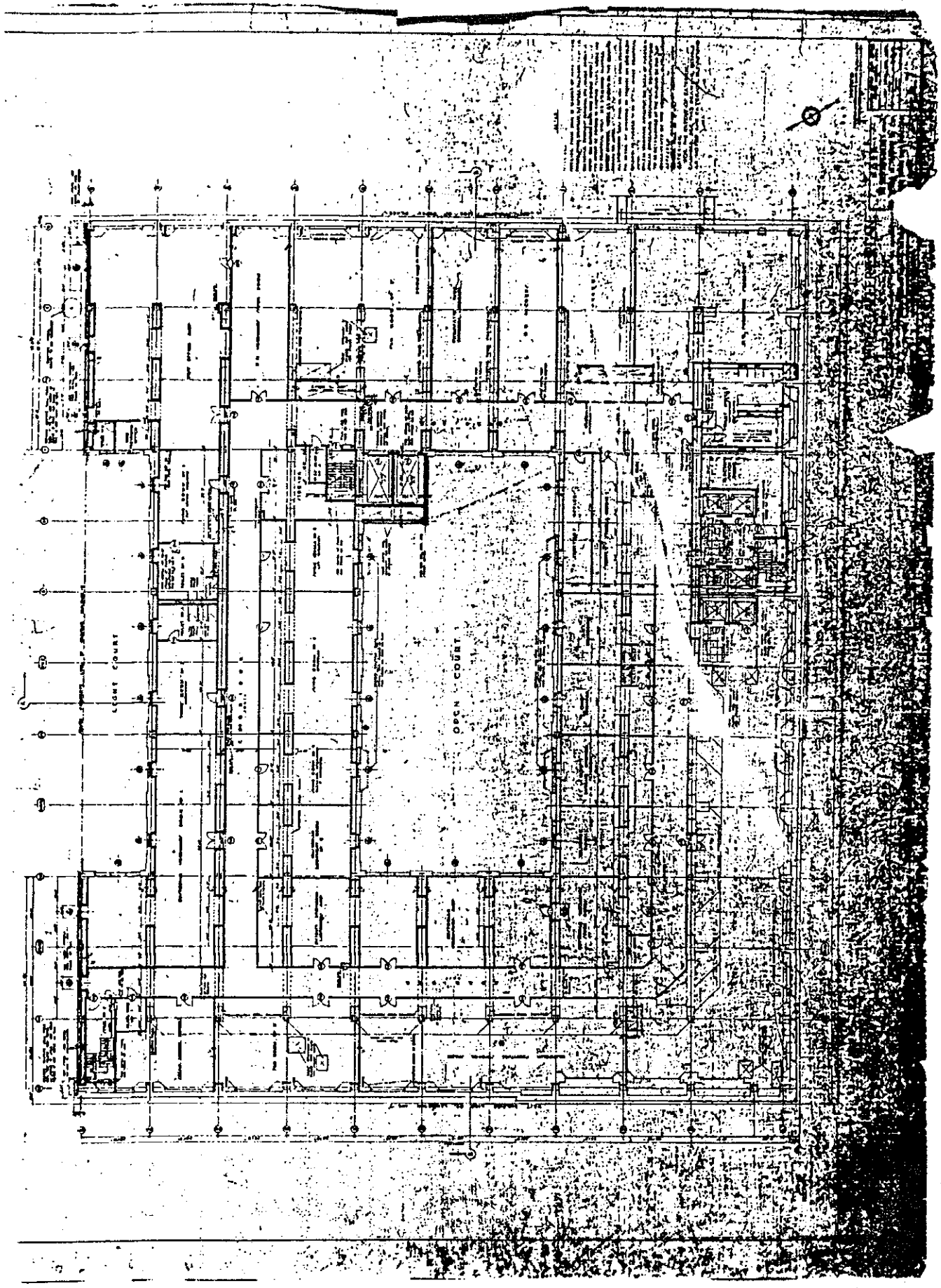
Second Floor Mezzanine Plan



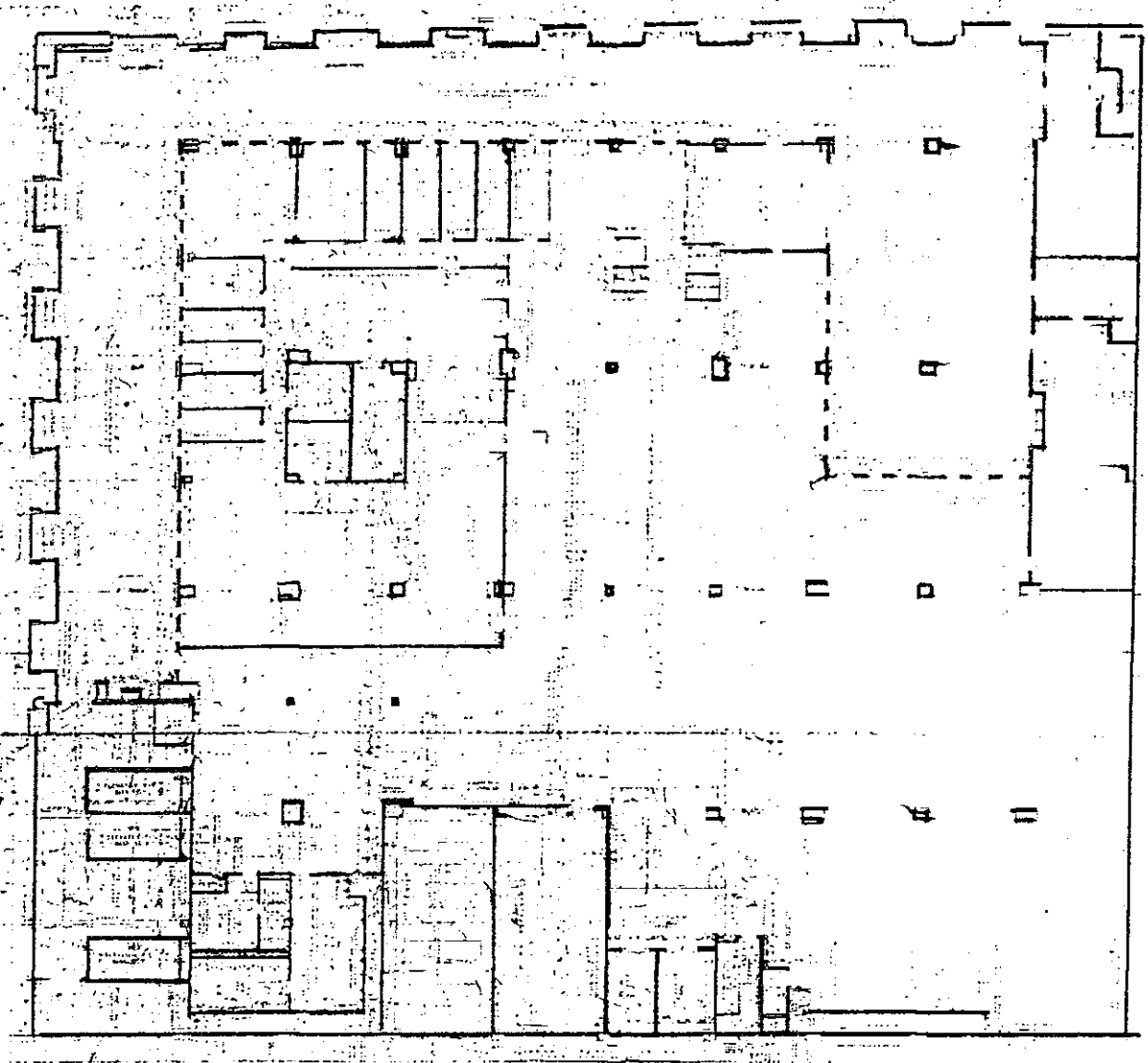
Second Floor Plan



Third Floor Plan



Pipe Gallery Plan

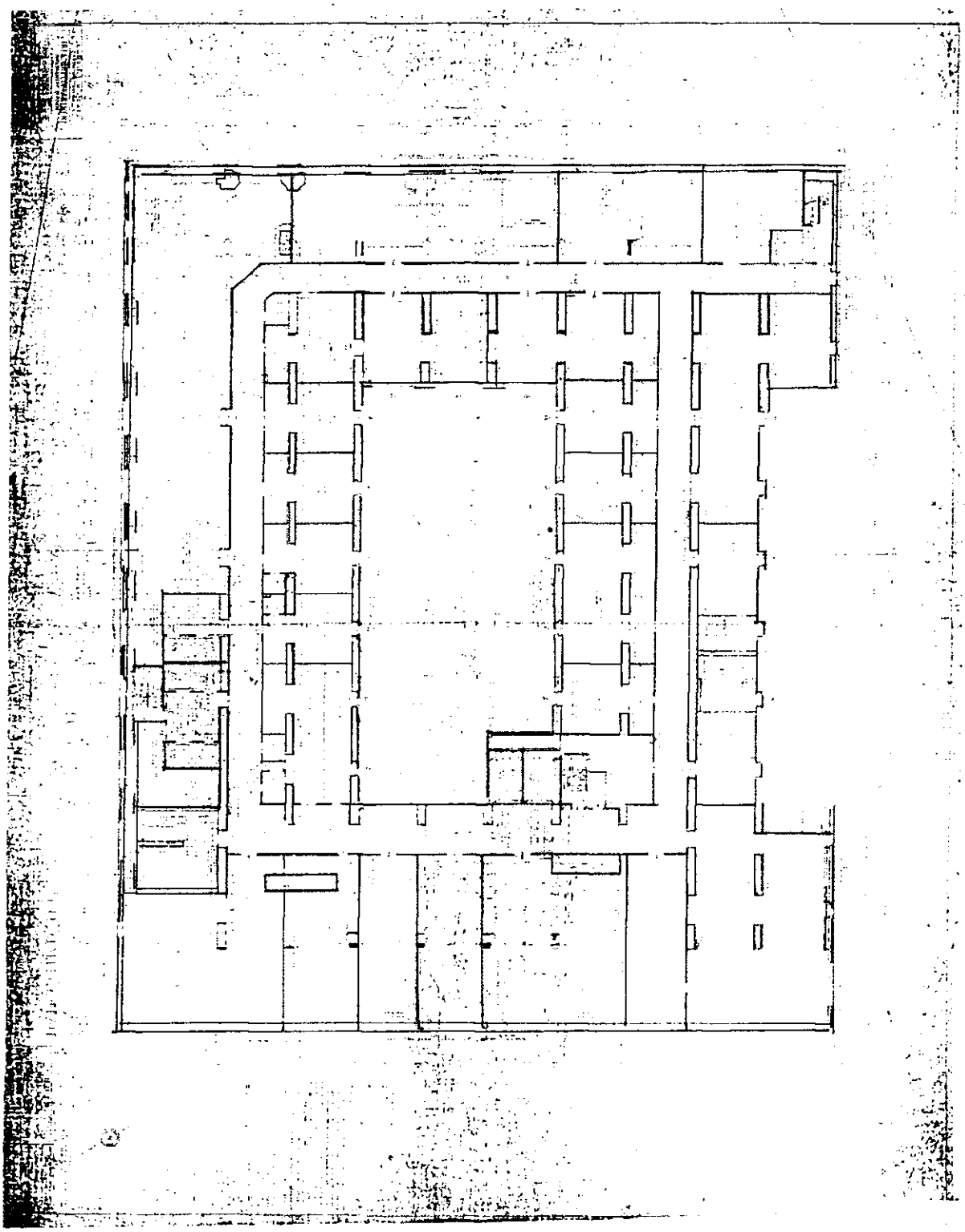


GROUND FLOOR PLAN

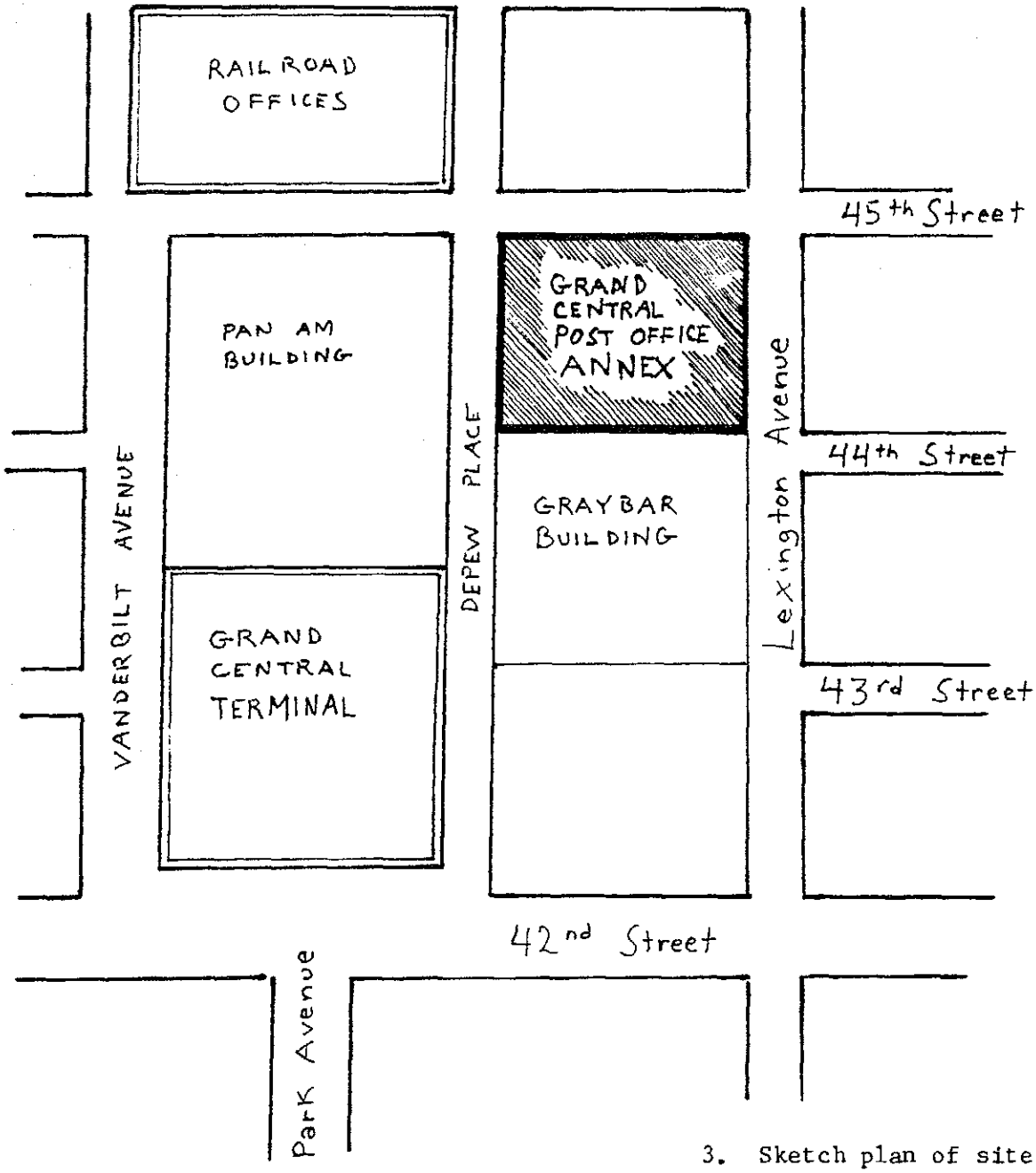
PART FIVE:
SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

1. Sketch floor plan, redrawn from 1937 architectural drawings.

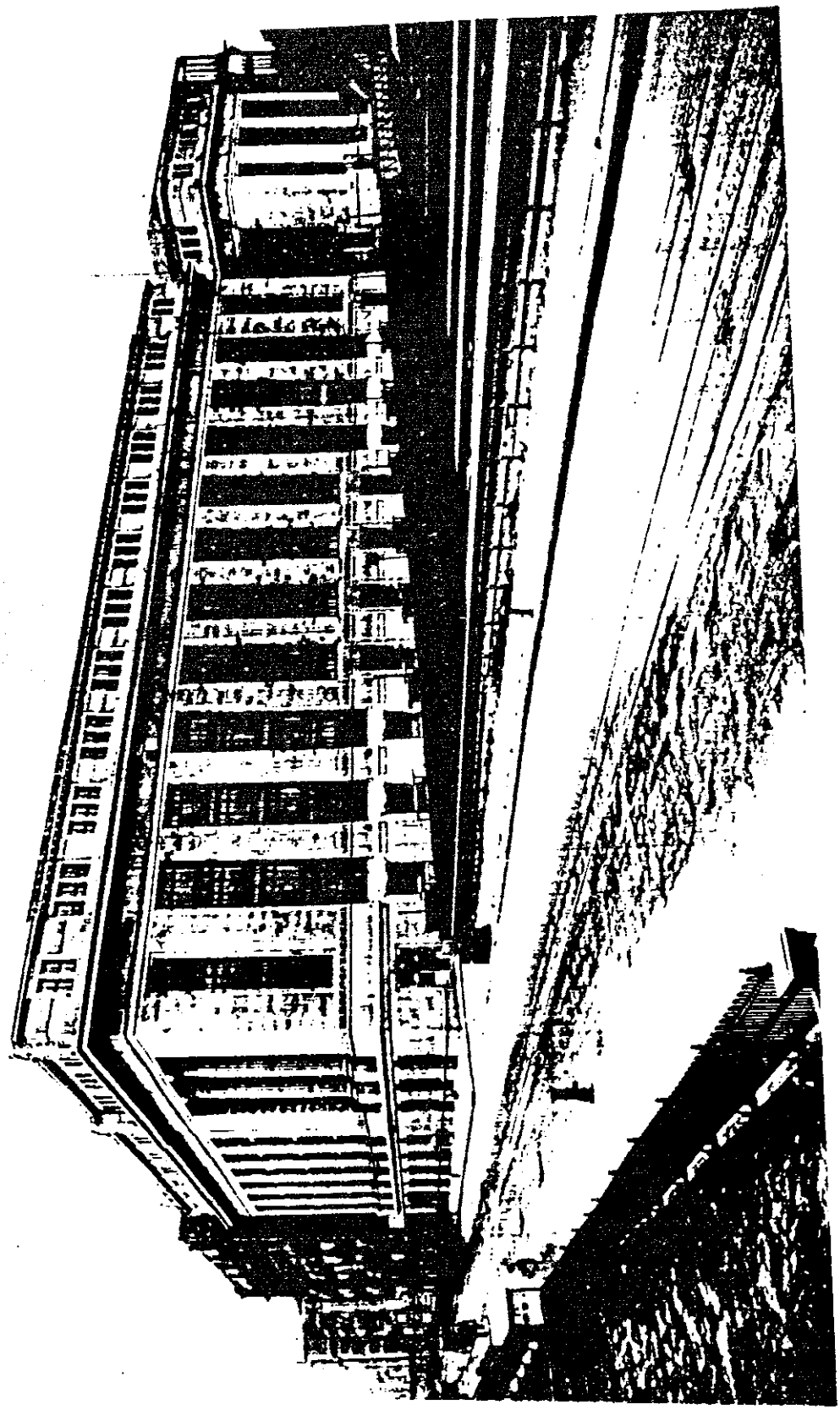
Ground story



2. Sketch plan, redrawn from 1937 architectural drawings. Pipe Gallery (Typical of floors three through five)



3. Sketch plan of site, showing associated buildings, as of 1989.



450 Lexington
Historic Photograph (circa 1909) looking south
on Lexington Avenue